

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 001789

SIPDIS

ENERGY FOR DAS JBRODMAN AND CGAY
TREASURY FOR ASEVERENS AND SRENENDER
COMMERCE FOR KBURRESS
STATE PASS TRANSPORTATION FOR MARAD
STATE PASS OPIC FOR ZHAN AND MSTUCKART
STATE PASS TDA FOR NCABOT
STATE PASS EXIM FOR JRICHTER
STATE PASS USTR FOR ASST USTR SLISER
STATE PASS USAID FOR GWEYNAND AND SLAWAETZ

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/20/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [EPET](#) [ASEC](#) [NI](#) [DELTA](#)[VIOLENCE](#)

SUBJECT: ARRESTS SPARK RENEWED UNREST IN DELTA

REF: LAGOS 1463

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Thomas Furey for reasons 1.4 (B & D)

SUMMARY

1. (C) Simmering tensions in the Niger Delta took a dramatic upturn with the arrest of Ijaw militia leader Asari Dukubo late on September 20. With passions already enflamed by the arrest in London last week of Bayelsa Governor Alamieyeseigha, reportedly a major financier to Ijaw militias, Asari's arrest was met with sporadic gunfire and a Wednesday morning standoff between police and Asari's Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NGPVF) in Port Harcourt. The standoff continues and one hour after the "24-hour ultimatum" expired another gun battle erupted. The arrest of Dokubo Asari at this time could be a critical miscalculation on the part of the GON in its efforts to restore calm to the Niger Delta region. End summary.

RIVERS STATE UNREST

2. (U) Tensions in the Niger Delta mounted following the detention of Asari on September 20. Sporadic gunfire was reported after word of Asari's arrest Tuesday evening. This morning opened to renewed gunfire and a standoff in the Garrison Junction area of Port Harcourt between police and members of Asari's NDPVF, reportedly armed with anything from machetes to dynamite and rocket propelled grenades. By early afternoon a strong police and military presence was visible in the area, but according to residents, the standoff continues. Some sources report that at least two "explosions" occurred late on the 20th or early on the 21st in the Port Harcourt area.

3. (U) Elsewhere in Rivers State, protestors took to the streets in Asari's hometown of Buguma, a small community outside of Port Harcourt. Civil society groups reported an estimated 300 youths gathered peacefully, with no reported injuries. Civil leaders scheduled a meeting with the youth leaders at 1400, the NDPVF ultimatum's deadline for the release of Asari, in an attempt to headoff any escalation to violence.

4. (C) Governor Odili announced that he will intervene and seek Asari's release. Another prominent Ijaw leader, Chief Sara Igbe, pleaded for calm on state radio and assured the youths that Asari would be released today. However, in a phone call to PolCouns, he expressed anxiety and said that the "volatile" situation could worsen without Asari's release. An anxious calm has descended on the state since these assurances, as people await word on the Ijaw leader's freedom. At 1500, Mission received word that Asari had been freed, but sources in the security services and Asari's own lieutenants assert that he remains in detention. According to residents of Port Harcourt, many shops and schools are expected to remain closed tomorrow as a precaution.

5. (U) So far there have been no reports of involvement in today's protests by the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC), another Delta militia group which kicked off the current round of threats directed at British interests in response to the arrest of Governor Alamieyeseigha in London last week. However, militia groups from throughout the region have reportedly converged on Port Harcourt, with sightings of militants from Warri and other areas in the city.

ENERGY SECTOR UPDATE

6. (C) Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), Nigeria's largest oil producer, is the only major oil company headquartered in Port Harcourt. Public Affairs General Manger

Don Boham told us Shell has released its non-essential staff to go home early; approximately 4000 employees and contractors, about 95 percent of whom are Nigerian, work at the SPDC headquarters. Operational personnel working on rigs and flowstations are being held indoors on location. Boham reports the incidents in Port Harcourt have not affected Shell operations. The major U.S.-based oil companies are headquartered in Lagos, and have only small offices in Port Harcourt. In line with mission advice, they have gone largely into a lock-down status, in particular with reference to expatriate personnel. Chevron General Manager for Asset Management Chuck Taylor advised us their small Chevron office in Port Harcourt is closed, and all personnel are staying in their quarters. The Chevron Security Operations Manager has issued a security advisory, in which it suspended all business travel to Port Harcourt, and strongly advised employees in Port Harcourt to exercise caution when going out. They will make a decision late today whether to open their Port Harcourt office tomorrow. ExxonMobil Managing Director John Chaplin told us they have implemented travel restrictions to and within Port Harcourt. They have an unspecified number of people on site at the nearby Onne Free Port. They will keep them at this location until it is safe to remove them. ConocoPhillips Managing Director Todd Creeger is also keeping personnel in Port Harcourt indoors. He reports the Italian School, a major school for the expatriate community in Port Harcourt, has been closed.

PRESS REPORT

17. (U) All the major Lagos-based dailies today reported continued protests in the Delta region over the reported arrest of the Bayelsa State Governor Diepreye Alamieyeseigha in London. The Lagos-based daily business and financial publication Business Day exclusively reported the kidnapping of two foreign nationals believed to be oil workers in the region. Mission has not been able to confirm this report. The dailies also reported that the police in Port Harcourt have arrested Asari in connection to the threat of violence by Ijaw youths. He was reported flown to Abuja where some reports said he might face charges of sedition. According to the reports, the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force has responded by giving the Nigerian Government a 24 hour ultimatum to release their leader failing which they will attack foreign nationals and disrupt oil exploration activities in the Delta region.

ACS REPORT

18. (U) Consulate Lagos released a warden message urging all AmCits to limit travel to and within the Delta region and to avoid crowds and public places. There are approximately 500 AmCits registered in Port Harcourt.

COMMENT

19. (C) Comment: Tensions in the Delta region have been building over the past year. The militias, including the NDPVF and IYC, have been lying in wait since the cease fire last December, and a dustup was bound to happen sooner or later. The arrest of Asari may have pushed the region to a critical point. Asari, no friend of the Bayelsa Governor, is influential among a different segment of the Ijaw ethnic group and has the reputation among many in the region as a modern-day "Robin Hood." Inciting this group, in addition to the Bayelsa faction, could turn out to be a critical miscalculation rather than a part of the GON's efforts to restore calm to the Niger Delta region. End comment.

110. (U) This is a joint Lagos-Abuja cable.
CAMPBELL